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The Explosive Mideast

Study of the Factors Causing Instability, To Which Red Moves Have Been Added

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CPYRGHT

The new crisis in the Middle East erupted last week into the largest armed clash since 1948. recently deliberate Communist meddling. This has taken place on two fronts, the political and

The Israeli-Egyptian border battle ended with conflicting claims, with nothing resolved and with emotions raw. The future is, therefore, grim.

Numerous long-term problems, to which no solutions are in sight, make the continued instability of the Middle East almost inevitable. Some of these—the unstable political establishments of the Arab states, the feudalistic social systems, the backward economies—are ancient problems. Two are new since World War II.

One is the establishment of Israel, a modern, semi-industrialized nation, in an ancient and strongly contrasting environment. Inevitable frictions, some of them resulting from the insecurity of both Israel and the Arab states, have been caused.

Religious, economic, political, emotional and other animosities, and the population pressure of a new and growing state in a semi-arid and economically backward region have built up, and are still building up, tensions. These are expressed in repeated Israeli-Arab border incidents.

Vacuum Caused by British

The second new problem since World War II is the reduction of British power in the Middle East. British military strength, represented in large measure by the old Indian Army, had been a stabilizing factor there for decades.

The withdrawal of British troops from the Suez Canal Zone, hailed by so many at the time as a factor for peace and stability, was bound to have exactly the opposite effect, as, indeed, it has. The completely contradictory military justification offered for the withdrawal was that, on the one hand, the base had lost its military usefulness, and that on the other, Britain and her allies would be able to use it in case of war.

Withdrawal was supposed to "buy" Egyptian and Arab friendship. It has had no such effect. On the contrary, it has been interpreted in its true light—as an act of weakness.

Above all, it created another vacuum of power in an area already noted for its lack of power. The indigenous states do not have the strength to fill Britain's shoes, and even a partial substitution of native power for British power is prevented by the conflict between the two strongest countries of the area—

To these long-term and unresolved problems has been added

recently deliberate Communist meddling. This has taken place on two fronts, the political and the military.

Communists have penetrated, although they have not dominated, most of the Arab nationalist movements in the Middle East and Africa. Egypt has been hospitable to all sorts of anti-French agitation and propaganda. Communism, in other words, has been aiding and encouraging nationalism to stir up armed trouble.

The Czechoslovak-Egyptian arms deal was, however, the final factor that brought the Middle East to the boiling point. Israel lives in fear of strongly armed Arab neighbors.

Israel knows, despite all her propaganda of the last few weeks, that she is stronger today, in a military sense, than all the Middle Eastern Arab states combined. But there are 41,600,000 Arabs in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, and the Israelis number only about 1,600,000.

Advantages of Quality

At the moment, the Israelis have all the advantages of quality in military training, discipline, organization, leadership, will to fight and arms. They even have quantitative advantages in most categories of arms.

But, aided by the Communists, the Arab states might be able in time to neutralize these present Israeli advantages. So the Middle East well justifies the phrase so often applied in the past to other sensitive areas — " tinderbox."

Whether the "tinderbox" bursts into flame depends in part upon the extent of Communist meddling in the area. The exact extent of the Czechoslovak-Egyptian arms deal is unknown. But the offer of Communist arms has not been limited to Egypt.

Some time ago, Allen W. Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, noted that the Soviet Union and its satellites had thousands of obsolescent or surplus tanks, planes and guns, which could be used "as an adjunct to a general program of causing trouble throughout the world." Some of these surplus arms have been supplied to Communist China, North Korea and Northern Vietnam and have been offered to Austria and Afghanistan.

In the Middle East, they have been offered to Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, Lebanon's smallest state, is the only one to refuse the suggested barter deal.

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